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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000832

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SUBJECT: CHARGE MEETS WITH GUINEA'S NEW PRIME MINISTER

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Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. After describing how he unexpectedly landed the position of prime minister, Kabine Komara assured Charge that he expects to have "complete autonomy" as Guinea's new head of government. He said that he will be free to appoint his own cabinet, although he expects to appoint two or three military officials to some of the remaining cabinet positions. Komara's most pressing concerns include managing popular expectations for quick fixes to endemic problems, maintaining eligibility for debt relief under HIPC, and avoiding suspension of bilateral assistance programs. Komara gave a positive first impression. Guineans and foreign observers alike will be watching him closely in the coming weeks in order to ascertain how effective a civilian leader he might be. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Charge Raspolic met with Guinea's new prime minister, Kabine Komara, the evening of January 3, the day after Komara arrived in Guinea to assume office. Switching back and forth between English and French, often in mid-sentence, Komara was a charming and animated interlocutor.

BECOMING PRIME MINISTER

¶3. (SBU) Relating how he became prime minister, Komara told Charge that President Moussa Dadis Camara had called him while he was in Paris, asking him to be part of Guinea's new government. Komara said that he went home to his three adult children in Cairo and discussed whether it was a good move to become part of the government now, or to wait a few years until a newly elected government is in power. His children reportedly encouraged him to take the job because he would best be able to influence events in the immediate term. Komara said that he called the president and told him he was interested in working for the new government. Assuming that he was coming to discuss his potential role further with the president, Komara received a text message from his wife in Conakry after he had already started his trip to Guinea. His wife reportedly texted that Komara had been named prime minister and that she would meet him at the airport with a clean boubou so that he could address the press gathered there.

COMPLETE AUTONOMY

¶4. (C) Komara said that he has a good relationship with President Camara. When asked about forthcoming cabinet appointments, Komara said that he would "absolutely" be able to name his own ministers, and that he recognized the need for wider ethnic participation. However, he told Charge that he expected that two or three of the remaining ministerial

positions would be filled by military officers. He said, for example, that the Minister of Justice could easily be filled by a military officer if that officer had experience with the military justice system. Again emphasizing that President Camara would not influence cabinet appointments, Komara related how Camara had passed him a piece of paper with the name of the president's choice for Minister of Finance written down. Describing the nominee as a poor choice, Komara said he went back to the president and told him that he would not name this person as his minister. Camara reportedly told him "fine, pick who you want."

15. (SBU) As prime minister, Komara said that he strongly believes that he will enjoy complete autonomy. He told Charge that he expects to coordinate decisions with the president, but that he would be empowered to run the government as needed. Komara said that he had already talked to the president about the frequent communiques coming out of the CNDD, and requested that he have an opportunity to clear all further communiques before they are issued. The president reportedly agreed.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

16. (SBU) At the same time, Komara was concerned about managing both public and military expectations. He noted that the CNDD had made a lot of promises and may be expecting Komara to come in and quickly solve problems perpetuated by decades of corruption. Describing previous government officials as a bunch of "crooks," Komara said that the

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government cannot fix everything all at once. He drew the Charge's attention to the new-looking black leather furniture in his office. Komara said that former Prime Minister Souare had handed him a stack of unpaid invoices upon leaving office, including an invoice for the new office furniture. "Most of this stuff has not even been paid for," he said. Komara added that many of the invoices listed "ridiculous" charges, sometimes as much as five times what something should have been worth.

FINANCIAL WORRIES

17. (SBU) Komara emphasized that his biggest worry is that Guinea may lose the long anticipated debt relief under HIPC. "I do not know how the government will survive if we do not get that relief," he told Charge. Based on his own informal calculations, Komara said that he already sees a 2009 budgetary gap of at least \$88 million. Charge pointed out that any funds freed up by debt relief under HIPC must target specific sectors, such as education and health. Komara nodded in understanding, saying that those sectors could certainly use additional resources.

18. (SBU) Charge questioned what the government could do to address key public issues such as water and power. Komara said he hoped to capitalize on his personal network of contacts to bring in specialists that could develop a long-term infrastructure development plan. Komara noted that Guineans generally do not pay taxes and they are even less interested in paying for public utilities. He told Charge that only by providing regular services could the government begin to effect the mentality shift necessary to begin collecting tax revenues.

19. (C) Turning to USG bilateral assistance programs, Charge told Komara that the USG was planning to announce the suspension of all non-humanitarian, non-electoral financial assistance on January 5 in the absence of an announced election date within six months. Visibly concerned, Komara asked for details on what kinds of assistance would be cut.

He asked the Charge to provide him with a list of such programs as soon as possible. Komara also requested that the USG consider postponing the decision for another week in order to give him time to address some of our key concerns.

LACK OF MILITARY DISCIPLINE

¶10. (SBU) Charge also mentioned the incident in which the military raided opposition leader Cellou Diallo's residence on January 1 (reftel). Komara said that he was totally unaware of the incident until he received a phone call at 11:30 that night. He immediately called the president who also reportedly knew nothing about it. Komara said that he went personally to Diallo's residence to apologize. He acknowledged to Charge that the incident makes it look as if the government lacks complete control.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Based on first impressions, Komara seems affable, intelligent, and committed to his job. If he is in fact granted complete autonomy and allowed to run the government, he may very well be able to move things forward. At the same time, he faces a host of challenges that previous government officials have been unable to overcome, despite the sincerity of intentions they may have demonstrated in the beginning. Facing very high popular expectations for immediate improvements in overall governance while lacking a popular mandate may make it difficult for Komara to effectively assert his authority with the military junta. Guineans and foreign observers alike are watching Komara's cabinet nominations and subsequent political moves closely in order to get a sense of how effective a civilian leader he might be. END COMMENT.
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